

## Why a Minnesota child’s family doesn’t want ICE to deport her murderer

Demands that state and local authorities turn over “the worst of the worst” could set a killer free, a family worries.



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Analysis by Karen Tumulty

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On April 20, 1999, the nation’s attention was fixed on a shooting massacre that occurred at Columbine High School near Littleton, Colorado, killing 12 students and one teacher. That same day, in the small southern Minnesota town of Waseca, another horror was unfolding: Jayme Larson, 16, returned home from school to find the body of her 12-year-old sister, Cally Jo, stabbed, sexually assaulted and left hanging in the stairwell of their bungalow.

It took police nearly a year to find the man who would be convicted. He turned out to be Lorenzo Bahena Sanchez, a Mexican citizen in the United States illegally who is now serving a life sentence in Minnesota Correctional Facility-Stillwater. The soonest he could be released on parole is 2030. The review process will begin in early 2027, and Cally’s family has vowed to fight every step of the way.

Cally's loved ones now have a new terror: Under the Trump administration's aggressive immigration enforcement effort, Sanchez might be turned over to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, deported and sent elsewhere, perhaps to his native Mexico, where he might walk free.

Last week, Jayme's husband, Chad, sent a frantic, anguished email to state officials, including Attorney General Keith Ellison, Minnesota Corrections Commissioner Paul Schnell and his two U.S. senators. (The couple spoke to The Washington Post on the condition that neither their last name nor their location be used.)

"We do not care if he was born here or born in Mexico, he committed a crime here. He needs to finish his sentence here — where we know exactly where he is and we know that he won't hurt anyone else," Chad wrote Tuesday. "We want him to take his last breath in a Minnesota prison. When he is up for parole in about a year, we will be there demanding he remain in prison. Until that time, we are seeking confirmation that he will never be turned over to ICE for deportation."

President Donald Trump has repeatedly pledged to deport the "worst of the worst" immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally, calling out rapists, murderers and other felons. Sanchez would certainly appear to fall into that category.

That, however, is what terrifies Cally's family. According to Schnell, there is an active ICE detainer on Sanchez — an order for him to be turned over to federal authorities.

In the white-hot, polarizing debate that is going on over immigration policy, there is one issue upon which practically everyone agrees: Violent criminals who are in the country illegally should be deported. In an Economist/YouGov poll published Wednesday, 87 percent agreed with that proposition.

But there are complexities behind what seem to be the most straightforward questions when it comes to immigration.

Data suggests the vast majority of immigrants lately being taken into ICE custody are not hardened criminals. An October review of ICE's numbers by the Cato Institute found that in the previous weeks, nearly 3 in 4 booked into ICE custody had no criminal conviction, and only 5 percent had a conviction for a violent criminal offense.

Department of Homeland Security spokeswoman Tricia McLaughlin pointed out, in response to an inquiry by The Washington Post, that the way detainers — such as the one that applies to Sanchez — work is that "the criminals serve their time and then are turned over to ICE. They aren't taken out prematurely before they serve their time."

But in an interview, Schnell said handing over incarcerated inmates to ICE is indeed a new policy that is being sought by border czar Tom Homan and top officials, as part of ongoing

negotiations that could lead to the withdrawal of the surge of thousands of enforcement personnel in Minneapolis.

“We’ve been asked to release people from our custody who are actively serving sentences, and that’s not something that we have an interest in doing,” Schnell said.

The administration’s desire to take custody of prisoners who are here illegally has also been expressed publicly by top Trump officials on a number of occasions.

To bring about “a clear and simple path to restoring law and order in Minnesota,” White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said at a briefing last week, “number one, Governor Walz, Mayor Frey, and all Democrat leaders should turn over all criminal illegal aliens currently incarcerated in their prisons and jails to federal authorities, along with any illegal aliens with active warrants or known criminal histories for immediate deportation.”

Leavitt said that was a condition conveyed by Trump in a conversation with Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz (D).

What might happen when someone such as Cally’s convicted killer is simply deported, perhaps to his own country? That is far from clear.

“The policy has always been for sentences to be carried out in the U.S., i.e. not to release early just because someone is deportable for the crime that was committed,” Doris Meissner, who in the 1990s was head of what was then known as the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, wrote in an email.

She noted that some states have sought to release to federal authorities for deportation foreign-born criminals before their sentences to ease prison overcrowding and costs.

“In a case like this, if he were released early, the U.S. would have to work with Mexico to have him finish his sentence,” Meissner said. “But Mexico could be expected to object, saying it doesn’t have authority to incarcerate someone who wasn’t convicted in its criminal justice system.” She also added that countries may object to bearing the costs of incarcerating someone who committed a crime outside their borders.

As it happens, according to Cally’s relatives, Sanchez had been deported — *after* he had killed her.

He subsequently reentered the country illegally, and returned to Waseca, where local police arrested him on suspicion of a subsequent home burglary.

It was during that investigation that he became a suspect for Cally’s murder, when the state’s Bureau of Criminal Apprehension found one of her hairs and some of her possessions, including a compact disc carrying case, where he was living.

The Trump administration has been quick to criticize local law enforcement officials for not cooperating with federal agents. Cally's family sees it differently.

They "never gave up finding justice for Cally. Many have become like family," Jayme said. "I have every confidence that they will continue to support our family and advocate that Cally's killer serve his full life sentence."

*Marianne LeVine contributed to this report.*

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